

INTEROPERABLE WIRELESS BROADBAND NETWORK

Mr. ROCKEFELLER. Mr. President, tomorrow is March 11. For most of us, this date carries no particular significance. It does, however, reflect exactly 6 months before September 11. That date we do remember and will not forget. It is 6 months from the anniversary of the worst terrorist attack ever and a day that we as a nation can never forget. It is 6 months from the date we will honor the memory of those whose lives came to an end and the way we came together, at least for a short period of time, as a nation.

With that historic date approaching, I think it important that we honor the tremendous bravery of all public safety officials. I believe this is one of the most important issues facing the country, and it is one we can do something about very quickly and reduce the budget deficit by doing so.

Our police, our firefighters, our emergency medical technicians, and the countless others who fought that day to keep us safe and who work every day to protect us from harm—we have essentially forgotten about them.

The 9/11 Commission specifically said that you have to have a system that connected all law enforcement across this Nation in an interoperable wireless system. Obviously, therefore, that is a way of saying that the best and simplest way to honor them is to give them the tools they need to be successful, to be safe, and to do their job in a way that does not expose them to needless dangers. Right now, we are not doing that.

Much as in the first gulf war, when the Army and the Navy and the Marines and the Air Force could not communicate with each other because they were all on different systems of communications—and we all kind of laughed at that as being kind of pathetic. They have solved that, sort of, but we have not solved this one at all, involving every single American and every single firefighter, policeman, and law enforcement officer, deputies, sheriffs, all across America. When it comes to public safety communications, these everyday heroes do not have the networks that they could so easily have and that they so desperately need because we have not acted. It is the 10-year anniversary coming up 6 months from now—we have not acted.

Too often, first responders lack that interoperable network that is essential to providing an effective response in emergencies, all kinds of emergencies—a lot of them very desperate, not all of them catastrophic, but there is always that potential. They don't have the ability to communicate with one another. They don't have the ability to communicate with other agencies. They don't have the ability to communicate with other cities and States across State lines. They cannot do that. It is kind of pathetic in the age of the Internet. We have chosen to do nothing. Instructed by the 9/11 Com-

mission to do something a long time ago, we have done nothing. This hampers our ability to respond to a crisis, this lack of equipment. Whether that crisis is a terrorist attack or a natural disaster, it puts lives in unnecessary peril.

I believe it is time to do something about it. In the Commerce Committee, we happen to take that approach. That is why I introduced S. 28, the Public Safety Spectrum and Wireless Innovation Act. This legislation does two things. First, it sets aside the 10 megahertz of spectrum known as the D-Block. I don't know why it is called the D-Block, but it is the D-Block. Its 10 megahertz adds on to the 10 megahertz they already had, making 20, which means they could do the whole thing, completely connect with each other, every sheriff, police person, law enforcement, Federal, State, county, municipal. They would all be on one system and talk to each other from a common communications base and a common database. It is an interoperable wireless broadband network that we have to have, and it is that which we do not have. We do not have it because we have not made the effort.

Secondly, it gives the Federal Communications Commission the authority to do something very interesting: to hold incentive auctions based on the voluntary return of spectrum which is not necessarily being used by a whole variety of people who just want to hold on to it. It is better to hold on to something than to give it, but we give them an incentive on a voluntary basis—crucial word in this legislation—on a voluntary basis to return that spectrum. In turn, these auctions will provide the funding to support the construction and maintenance of the public safety network which they need and which I have been speaking about, and they free up additional spectrum for innovative commercial uses.

In short, this bill marries resources for the first responders with good commercial spectrum policy. It can keep us safe and help our economy grow. That is why the legislation has the support of absolutely every major public safety organization across this country, obviously including those of my State. That is why this bill also has strong support from all Governors and all mayors across this country. They have to deal with this. We do not; they do. That is why we now have the support of the administration.

I urge my colleagues to support the Public Safety Spectrum and Wireless Innovation Act. To those who say we cannot afford to do this now, obviously I would say we cannot afford not to. The role of intelligence reveals all kinds of things going on not only outside the country but inside the country, implying there is a target, or many of them, within this country.

But if this is not compelling enough, I think it is important for people to know this. This legislation pays for itself, plus does not cost a dime. Ac-

cording to the White House and even the industry itself, the telecommunications industry, incentive auctions will bring in revenue so much above what funding public safety requires, it will leave billions over that amount for, for example, deficit reduction. I am talking a whole lot of deficit reduction. Billions and billions. So it is a win-win-win.

I close. Let me say we have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to provide our public safety officials with the spectrum they need to communicate when tragedy strikes. We have chosen not to do that. Now there is this sort of malicious pressure of the 9/11 Commission's directive to us to do our duty as a country to the people who keep us safe.

More than that, we do need to keep this country safe, and it is not always going to be safe. We do not know when the next attack will come. So we have the incentive auctions, which are voluntary, but they will work. They can be sold for lots of money, and we will have, therefore, lots of money over and above what it costs to build this interoperable wireless broadband system across the entire country, connecting every law enforcement official to every other one.

To my colleagues I say, let's seize this moment. This is not Republican, this is not Democrat, it is simply the right thing to do. I ask people to think back to those images of 9/11, of that day, not just the 9/11 Commission report that emanated from that, why we could not stop that, but to think of the images of that day, of what those people absorbed in their lungs, the natural instinct for firefighters to come from all over the country, policemen to come from all over the country, ambulance people to come from all over the country, to New York City, a city which they do not start out loving generally out there in the hinterlands. But they knew this was a crisis, they reacted, they saved lives, they imperiled their own, and many of them lost their lives.

Let's do something historic, and let's do it together, and let's do it here in this Congress. And, certainly, let us get this all done before the 10th anniversary of September 11.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Illinois.

FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY

Mr. KIRK. Mr. President. We are borrowing over \$5 billion per day.

That's \$35 billion borrowed per week to run our government, totaling over \$1.5 trillion in borrowed money just to run for a year.

Harvard's great economic historian, Niall Ferguson, noted that the decline of a country can be marked when it pays its moneylenders more than its army. His classic case comes from the French monarchy of the 1780s who failed to make interest payments on

their debt, causing the financial collapse that triggered the Revolution. Recently, Carmen Reinhard and Kenneth Rogoff wrote a brilliant book called "This Time is Different, Eight Centuries of Financial Folly." Their vast study revealed that most government officials believe they are always unique and different, causing them to make the same mistakes that crippled past nations and empires.

Using Ferguson's tipping point, where are we today?

This year, the total cost of maintaining our army will equal \$137 billion. This same year, we will pay \$225 billion in interest to our money lenders for the use of \$14 trillion borrowed from China, Japan and elsewhere. The startling conclusion is that we have already passed Ferguson's tipping point by paying America's money lenders more than our own Army.

It gets worse.

In just 6 years, the administration says that we will have to pay over \$661 billion to our money lenders for interest on our rapidly expanding debt. With the expected cost of our Army at \$195 billion, our Air Force at \$201 billion and our Navy/Marines at \$217 billion, the total cost of \$613 billion to provide for our common defense will be smaller than the \$661 billion due to the money lenders. In simple economic terms, we will be forced to pay our lenders their interest money first, before caring for our own safety, or risk seeing the value of the dollars in our own wallets disappear.

Remember, these numbers are optimistic. They assume no severe spike in interest costs and no other war.

Recently, the Senate agonized over a short-term, 2-week spending bill that made a \$4 billion cut to spending. We should see that bill's cuts as modest knowing that we already pay \$616 million daily in interest and over \$4 billion per week. In sum, the cuts of the 2-week bill saved just 1 week of interest payments.

As dire as this situation is, there is a bright side. Our country has seen this movie before. Washington, Lincoln and Roosevelt all accumulated economy-crushing debts as the fate of the United States hung in the balance. Our best example of what to do next comes from our own grandparents, rightly called the "Greatest Generation."

Tom Brokaw coined the title for Americans of the 1930s and 1940s who defeated the Depression, Japanese and Nazis simultaneously. I would add a fourth, largely unnoticed victory that Brokaw missed. After three great victories for freedom, our grandparents spent the next 20 years paying the debts incurred to win the contests of the Depression, Pacific and Europe. Their accumulated debts of 1946 totaled over 120 percent of our national income. Economists report that between economic growth and some inflation, the Greatest Generation reduced the crippling World War II debts that secured our victory during the late 1940s

and 1950s. The return to more fiscally responsible government sparked an economic boom that built the super power called the United States of America.

The lesson of history is clear. Each generation of Americans faces conflict, war and debt. Each generation is tested. The looming debt crisis facing this government is our generation's test. While some government officials and bankers may still counsel ineffective action saying "we owe this money to ourselves" or "because the dollar is the reserve currency, we can owe this amount," we know that the crisis we face is not that different from the ones that crippled other nations. With spending cuts and discipline we can master this danger, as our grandparents did. The need to do the hard things, like entitlement reform, is similar to the dramatic moves our grandparents made to secure our future.

But there is one difference between us and other nations. From the dawn of our revolution, the United States became the greatest force for human liberty and individual dignity ever known. The U.S. ended slavery, gave women the right to vote and spread freedom across Europe, Latin America and Asia. We are now challenged by 21st century world views in the Middle East and China that do not hold the western value of the individual as high as we do. It is therefore doubly important to do the work needed to reduce spending and balance the books so that we restore the vitality of a free people and their cause of expanding liberty and individual dignity.

Next time you talk to a member of the Greatest Generation, do not just say thank you. Ask them for advice on how to trim budgets and restore growth in the face of extraordinary debts, just as they did.

I yield the floor and I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. VITTER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. VITTER. Mr. President, I too take the floor of the Senate to urge all of us, Democrats and Republicans alike, to focus on the single biggest domestic threat to our country, our single greatest challenge in the eyes of every Louisianan and every American I know, and that is to stop this runaway spending and debt.

Americans all around the country, certainly Louisianans all around my State, understand this is a grave threat to our economic future. It is not some vague threat to generations two and three away from us. This is an immediate threat because the path of spending and debt we are on is completely unsustainable.

For example, we must come together in a bipartisan way. We must act. We must solve this real and pressing problem before it is an immediate crisis. We should clearly do that well before any need for an increase in the debt limit arises, well before this Congress reaches a crisis atmosphere over the need for an increase in the debt limit.

For all of these reasons, I have joined with many of my colleagues. I sent the majority leader a letter today. First, let me thank my colleagues who joined me on the letter: Senators SESSIONS, RUBIO, DEMINT, PAUL, LEE, TOOMEY, and ENSIGN. The letter is very simple and straightforward. It says this is the greatest challenge we face. It says because of that, we need to face it. We need to debate and talk about it and act. We need to start doing that now, well before any significant deadline like when the debt limit may have to be increased.

The letter says: Mr. Leader, we are going to oppose moving to any other bill that doesn't directly address this crisis when we need to act on this grave threat.

Let me read relevant portions that go right to the point:

Dear Leader Reid:

Yesterday, the Senate voted on two proposals to fund the government for the rest of the fiscal year. This debate gave only a limited (three hours) opportunity to debate what many Americans believe is the issue of our time—cutting government spending and dramatically reducing our national debt. Additionally, no member of the Senate was permitted to offer amendments under the structured process, which in our opinion prevents a full, open, and robust debate.

With our national debt poised to reach its \$14.3 trillion limit in the very near future, taxpayers expect Congress to work together to reduce wasteful and unnecessary spending and be more vigilant about how we spend public funds. The American people want Congress to deal with the tough issues of cutting spending, and almost every member of the Senate has agreed that we must address our fiscal situation immediately.

While there are certainly many issues that warrant the Senate's consideration, we feel that the Senate must not debate and consider bills at this time that do not affirmatively cut spending, directly address structural budget reforms, reduce government's role in the economy so businesses can create jobs, or directly address this current financial crisis.

The American people resoundingly rejected the way the Senate waited until Christmas Eve as a mechanism to force hurried debate on President Obama's massive health care legislation. Voting to proceed to another legislative measure effectively runs away from the central issues of spending and debt and repeats that flawed process.

We, therefore, are notifying you of our intention to object to the consideration of any legislation that fails to directly address this crisis in a meaningful way. Our objections would be withheld if the Senate agrees to dedicate significant floor time to debate this issue well in advance of the federal government reaching our statutorily mandated debt limit.

It is signed "Sincerely" from both myself and Senators SESSIONS, RUBIO, DEMINT, PAUL, LEE, TOOMEY, and ENSIGN, to the majority leader.

The statement is clear. This is a crisis. We need to act before we reach the statutory debt limit. So what are we waiting for? Let's act now. Let's not move to other cats and dogs bills that may be positive legislation but can certainly wait. Let's move to the people's business. Let's move to the absolute top challenge we face domestically. Let's come together and debate, vote on, and hopefully begin to solve this problem of unsustainable spending and debt.

To do that we also need leadership, ideas, suggestions. I believe we have provided that on this side of the aisle, and we would welcome ideas, suggestions, and concrete proposals from all Members.

Let me list the more than two dozen pieces of legislation that go directly to this issue:

S. 14, by Senator ENSIGN, establishes a commission on congressional budgetary accountability and review of Federal agencies.

S. 81 is an Isakson bill to direct unused appropriations for Senate official personnel and office expenses to be deposited in the Treasury and actually used to reduce the Federal debt.

S. 102 is a McCain bill which requires OMB to transmit to Congress a message with specified information requesting any recession the President proposes under the procedures instituted under that act.

S. 162 is a Paul bill to cut \$500 billion in Federal spending from fiscal year 2011.

S. 163, by Senator TOOMEY, is the Full Faith and Credit Act to prioritize principle and interest payments when and if the debt limit is reached.

S. 178, by Senator DEMINT, reduces Federal spending by \$2.5 trillion through fiscal year 2021.

S. 245 is a Corker bill, the CAP Act, to create a discretionary spending cap for Congress.

S. 259 is my bill to prioritize Social Security payments if and when the debt limit is reached.

S. 360, by Senator INHOFE, creates a point of order to exceed nonsecurity discretionary limits and to create spending limits for fiscal years 2017 to 2021.

S. 389, by Senator KIRK—and Senator HATCH has a similar bill—establishes a commission to review cost control.

S. 391, by Senator MORAN, rescinds all unobligated balances of President Obama's stimulus bill.

S.J. Res. 3, by Senator HATCH, is a balanced budget amendment.

S.J. Res. 4, by Senator SHELBY, is on the same topic.

And S.J. Res. 5, by Senator LEE, is on the same topic.

This is a long list, but it is certainly not exhaustive. I have read a partial list to make the point. We are coming up with ideas, proposals, and solutions. We encourage every Senator of both parties to come up with ideas, proposals, and solutions. Let's actually talk about the greatest threat we face.

Let's talk about it now. Let's debate it now. Let's exchange ideas in a positive atmosphere now, well before we reach any crisis atmosphere over the debt limit.

I respectfully urge the distinguished majority leader, Senator REID, to heed our call to arms, to read our letter and react by creating an identified time on the Senate floor, well before we reach the statutory debt limit, to debate and pass solutions on this crucial topic.

I don't believe there is debate that this isn't the greatest challenge we face, that this isn't the greatest economic threat we face. Quite simply, what are we waiting for? We need time to bring forth these ideas and exchange them and debate them and act. We need time to do this well before the statutory debt limit is reached. We need to do the people's business in a reasonable way, in a sober atmosphere, not in an atmosphere of hysteria or threats when the debt limit would be reached in a matter of days.

I urge all colleagues to join us in this effort, to come to the floor with their ideas, their proposals. Let's do the people's business.

I ask unanimous consent that a partial list of Republican solutions and proposals be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

S. 14—an Ensign bill to establish the Commission on Congressional Budgetary Accountability and Review of Federal Agencies. Directs the President to designate two Commission co-chairpersons.

S. 81—an Isakson bill to direct unused appropriations for Senate Official Personnel and Office Expense Accounts to be deposited in the Treasury and used for deficit reduction or to reduce the Federal debt.

S. 102—a McCain bill which requires OMB to transmit to Congress a message with specified information requesting any recession the President proposes under the procedures established in this Act.

S. 162—a Paul bill to cut \$500 billion in federal spending from FY 2011.

S. 163—Toomey's Full Faith and Credit Act to prioritize principle and interest payments when the debt limit is reached.

S. 178—DeMint bill to reduce federal spending by \$2.5 trillion through 2021.

S. 245—Corker's CAP act to create a discretionary spending cap on Congress.

S. 259—Vitter bill to prioritize Social Security payments when the debt limit is reached.

S. 360—Inhofe bill to create a point of order to exceed non-security discretionary limits; also creates spending limits for FY 2017–2021.

S. 389—Kirk and Hatch bill to establish a commission which will conduct a review of cost control in the federal government every two years with respect to improving management and reducing costs. Directs the Commission to conduct in-depth studies to evaluate potential improvements in the operations of executive agencies and to develop recommendations regarding: (1) opportunities for increased efficiency and reduced costs that can be realized by executive action or legislation, (2) areas where managerial accountability can be enhanced and administrative control can be improved, (3) opportunities for managerial improvements over the short and long terms, (4) specific areas where further study can be justified by

potential savings, and (5) ways to reduce governmental expenditures and indebtedness and improve personnel management.

S. 391—Moran bill which rescinds all unobligated balances of the Obama stimulus bill.

S.J. Res. 3—Hatch's balanced budget amendment.

S.J. Res. 4—Shelby balanced budget amendment.

S.J. Res. 5—Lee balanced budget amendment.

Mr. VITTER. I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Texas.

ENERGY

Mrs. HUTCHISON. Mr. President, I rise to talk in morning business about the energy issue facing the country. Anyone who has filled up the car or truck in the last month knows we have an energy crisis that is building and needs to be addressed. Last week I filled up my pickup truck. It cost about \$50. Across the Nation, parents are driving in carpools. Farmers, small business owners, and commuters are experiencing sticker shock at the rising cost to put gas in their vehicles. Today oil is over \$104 a barrel. That means on average Americans are paying \$3.52 a gallon. It is going in the upward direction from there. We are clearly in an economic downturn. We have high unemployment. Now is not the time to sit back and do nothing as the price of gasoline goes up at the pump.

In response, the White House is beginning to talk about tapping the Strategic Petroleum Reserve. We know that will not work. The Strategic Petroleum Reserve is available for natural disasters and global disasters. But experience has shown that any gain from releasing oil from the Strategic Petroleum Reserve is small and temporary, and prices quickly go right back up to their high and rising levels. If we diminish our resources, our reserves in the Strategic Petroleum Reserve, we are even more vulnerable to those who would do mischief to the country because they would know we have a diminished supply, or to the natural disasters for which we are supposed to be prepared.

Our problem is, we are the only Nation on Earth that has vast natural resources which we will not use. American energy is out there. It is under our land. It is under our waters. It is ready to be tapped, and it can be tapped environmentally safely. We could bring the prices down on our own accord. We know there is upheaval in the Middle East right now that could affect further the gasoline prices because of potential shortages. We are too dependent on foreign sources for our energy needs. It is a little more than 50 percent. That is not strategically sound, and it is most certainly not in our national security interest to leave us at that level.

The Gulf of Mexico is one of the biggest resources we have. The Gulf of Mexico accounts for nearly 30 percent